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Key players expected at shoreline meeting

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By Amy Jo Johnson
TIMES WRITER

A roster of key players in the ongoing dispute over beach weeds is expected to attend a meeting Tuesday on the issue in Bangor Township.

The meeting, hosted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and state Rep. Joseph L. Rivet, D-97th District, will address the regulation of wetland activities along the Saginaw Bay shoreline.

Also expected to attend are members of Save Our Shoreline, a group pushing for property owner's rights; local environmentalists; the Michigan departments of Environmental Quality and Natural Resources; Michigan Sea Grant representatives; and elected state and federal officials.

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The meeting will be from 2-4 p.m. Tuesday at the Bangor Township fire station, 3921 Wheeler Road, and is open to the public.

Lt. Col. Thomas H. Magness, Detroit District commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, will be on hand to discuss regulations and activities concerning the Lake Huron shoreline.

Shoreline property owners and government regulatory agencies have been at odds with one another since water levels dropped and vegetation started spouting up along the Great Lake beachfronts a couple years ago.

Many landowners want the OK to remove the plants, which they call weeds. Meanwhile, environmentalists and governmental agencies have advocated preserving what they perceive as emergent wetlands.

Rivet said his goal for the meeting is to move toward solving the dispute between landowners and regulatory agencies.

"I am very hopeful that those who participate in (the meeting) come with some willingness to listen ... and see that there is some area for compromise," Rivet said.

"We're trying to find environmentally sustainable solutions," Lt. Col. Magness said. "I think the balance we have in the attendees reflects the balance that we want to bring to the table in finding solutions."

Magness expects to walk away with more than just talk.

"I have been pushing my staff very, very hard for the last three weeks to be prepared for this meeting on Tuesday. We're bringing some stuff to the table," he said. "I believe the hard work of my staff is going to bring some dividends to the region, and I hope I'm not wrong."

Bay County Extension Director Howard J. Wetters will moderate the meeting.

There will be a number of three- to five-minute presentations at the beginning of the meeting.

Topics include the public's use and valuation of the shoreline wetlands; the reasons behind many shoreline property owners' objections to letting the shoreline wetland systems exist; and suggested management schemes for the wetlands under state and federal regulatory programs.

After the presentations, each audience member will have the opportunity to make a two-minute statement or ask a question.

- Amy Jo Johnson covers Bay County townships and cities for The Times. She can be reached at 894-9637.

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